

Lawmakers Focus on Daily Brief In Prewar Intelligence Debate; Kennedy Pushes for Access to Bush's Classified CIA Reports

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Senate and House Democrats focused their attention yesterday on the highly classified intelligence provided in the President's Daily Brief, as they continued to challenge White House statements that members of Congress saw the same intelligence on prewar Iraq that President Bush saw.

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) worked yesterday to attach to the fiscal 2006 intelligence authorization bill an amendment that would require portions of Presidential Daily Briefs (PDBs) from Jan. 20, 2000, to March 19, 2003, that referred to Iraq to be submitted to the appropriate congressional committees by the CIA Director Porter J. Goss.

In the House, Democrats on the intelligence committee sent a letter to Stephen J. Hadley, Bush's national security adviser, citing the PDB and other intelligence to argue that it was "highly misleading" to claim that the White House and Congress had equal access to prewar intelligence.

The moves on Capitol Hill were the latest in an increasingly hard-fought dispute between the administration and Democrats over whether the White House exaggerated and misused intelligence on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction to muster public support for the invasion.

In a Veterans Day speech, Bush said that "a hundred Democrats in the House and the Senate . . . had access to the same intelligence" as he did and voted "to support removing Saddam Hussein from power."

Five days later, Vice President Cheney said Democrats who now claim they were misled by the administration are "making a play for political advantage in the middle of a war," and he called the Democratic line of attack "one of the most dishonest and reprehensible charges ever aired in this city."

Kennedy yesterday described as "plain wrong" the statements by Bush and Cheney that Congress "had the same intelligence about Saddam's development of weapons of mass destruction as they did."

His amendment would give the Senate intelligence committee access to relevant PDBs as it conducts its "phase two" inquiry into prewar intelligence. That controversial probe will focus in part on how administration officials used intelligence in public speeches and testimony.

Kennedy's plan was to attach the amendment to the intelligence authorization bill that was expected to pass last night under a unanimous consent agreement. Late yesterday, however, when Democrats and Republicans failed to agree on final language for the Kennedy amendment, passage of the entire intelligence bill was delayed so that the Massachusetts senator's amendment could be voted upon when Congress returns Dec. 12.

In the House, Democrats also talked about the PDB.

"Congress does not have access to the President's Daily Brief" and other materials, said the letter sent to Hadley by a group led by Rep. Jane Harman (Calif.), ranking Democrat on the intelligence committee. They also pointed out that the president meets with top intelligence officials in the session for which the PDB is prepared. That "allows him full access to intelligence community officials and provides a set time each day when he can ask senior intelligence officials about the basis for their judgments."

Harman's group also held a news conference yesterday to complain that the chairman of the House intelligence panel, Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Mich.), had rejected a request for investigating the prewar intelligence because the Senate intelligence committee was undertaking that task.